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ABSTRACT

The seven narratives in this document were drawn from the reflective writings of administrators of color involved in the Nevada Project LEAD. Six school principals and one district administrator describe experiences they have encountered in managing ethnically and racially diverse elementary and secondary schools in Nevada. The first and last sections shed light on experiences shaped by such realities of the workplace as a strong organized teacher association; ever-changing political dynamics among school boards, community groups, and school district personnel; a burgeoning student population; rich cultural and racial diversity; parent and community support that can reverse suddenly; and frustrating resource constraints and bureaucratic regulations. The middle section offers personal reflections on what it means to be an administrator of color in public schools and reveals how race and ethnicity shape the school leadership experience. Specific topics mentioned include a clash between teachers and union contracts, involuntary principal transfer, learning to value one's ethnicity, mentors, attempting to change entrenched systems, and the importance of perseverance in striving for change. (54 references) (CLA)

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Reflections on Leadership
By Nevada School Administrators of Colour

August 1990

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REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP
BY NEVADA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF COLOUR

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ABOUT NEVADA PROJECT LEAD

Nevada Project LEAD is a consortium of Nevada educational organizations developed to provide technical assistance to Nevada school administrators. Participating agencies include the University of Nevada, Reno and Las Vegas campuses, the Nevada Department of Education, the Nevada Rural School District Alliance, the Nevada Association of School Boards, the Nevada Association of School Administrators, Clark County Board of Trustees, Clark County School District, Washoe County School District, Washoe County School Board, the Nevada Association of School Superintendents, the Catholic Diocese of Nevada, and private business. Funding is provided by a U.S. Department of Education LEAD grant and by the school districts of the state of Nevada. Activities and resources are dedicated to enhancing educational leadership skills through training opportunities, current research and maximazation of available resources. The project is located in the Educational Leadership Department of the College of Education, University of Nevada, Reno. Further information can be obtained by calling (702) 784-1107.

ABOUT FWL

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (FWL) serves the four-state region of Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah, working with educators at all levels to plan and carry out school improvements. The mission of FWL is to challenge and enable educational organizations and their communities to create and sustain improved learning and development opportunities for their children, youth, and adults. To accomplish its mission, FWL directs resources toward: advancing knowledge; developing products and programs for teachers and learners; providing assistance to educational agencies; communicating with outside audiences to remain informed and to inform others about the results of research, development, and exemplary practice; and creating an environment where diverse educational and societal issues can be addressed and resolved. Additional copies of *Reflections on Leadership by Nevada School Administrators of Colour* can be obtained by contacting Tom Ross, Information Specialist, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103 (415) 565-3044.

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INTRODUCTION

...managing the social institution is likely to be the frontier of management for the rest of the century....one quality cannot be learned, [there is] one qualification the manager cannot acquire but must bring with him. It is not genius: it is character.

Peter F. Drucker

The school is the site of dreams, opportunities and prospects. Our only future is in human resources, and human resources are the product of education.

Jaime Escalante

Thinking is easy, acting difficult, and to put one's thoughts into action, the most difficult thing in the world.

Goethe

In this book seven school administrators write about experiences they have encountered in managing ethnically and racially diverse elementary and secondary schools in Nevada. Their reflective narratives are not comprehensive discussions on school management, but rather a first attempt on the part of Nevada Project LEAD to record the insights and questions of school administrators about three fundamental realities of their work: the sheer complexity of managing schools today, the challenge of bringing about change in entrenched systems, and the importance of incorporating into educational decisionmaking the diverse life experiences and leadership styles that administrators of colour bring to their work.

Research has produced a rich literature on managing complex institutions and changing entrenched organizational routines (Bennis, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990; Drucker, 1973; Peters, 1987; Peters and Waterman, 1982), and on how culturally diverse experiences shape approaches to managerial understanding and action (Guthrie, 1989; Edelman, 1987; Sims, Gioia et. al., 1986; Isenberg, 1985; Ogbu, 1978). This book adds to the literature. The authors write about how their perceptions, decisions, and actions have put theory into practice, and about how they have coped with the consequences of their actions. The authors themselves selected the narrative topics. The events and issues they write about are as diverse as the school communities in which they work. (For purposes of confidentiality, the names of schools and individuals have been changed.)

Some narratives will strike a familiar chord in most school administrators regardless of race or ethnicity. Those in Sections I and III deal less with ethnicity than about experiences shaped by the realities of the school workplace: a strong organized teacher association; ever-changing political dynamics among school boards, community groups, school district personnel; a burgeoning student population,

rich in cultural and racial diversity; parent and community support that can see-saw from elated praise to overt hostility; and resource constraints and bureaucratic regulations that can tax the most dedicated, creative school leader. While the narratives describe events particular to a given school or district, educators who have worked in elementary and secondary schools will recognize the underlying tensions and management challenges the events illustrate.

Section II narratives deal more directly with race and ethnicity. Offering personal reflections about what it means to be an administrator of colour in public schools, the authors write about the special responsibilities that are inevitable, whether sought out or not. We see through their experiences the tenuous balance of allegiances among work, home and community and how race and ethnicity shape the school leadership experience. The narratives contain important messages for all educators in our multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual schools. In a recent issue of *Education Leadership*, Alex Molnar highlights the importance of the task the authors have taken on:

> Racism persists in the minds, hearts, and actions of too many Americans...and, sadly, continues to be transmitted to our children....Schools are not sanctuaries and educators cannot shut the classroom door on their responsibility to promote social justice in the face of the powerful manifestations of racism in our culture.

Describing work places that are far from "sanctuaries," the authors have taken a first step toward opening discussion about the complexity of managing schools today and about the messages we transmit about culture and race in them.

None of the narratives are written as blueprints for action. The authors write about *real* practice, not necessarily *expert* practice. The narratives provide glimpses into the school workplace from the authors' particular perspectives. The events they write about did, in fact, happen. By writing about actual practice, the authors hope to raise questions for broader discussion, suggest leadership approaches that have proven successful, or share insights about issues of general concern. As a whole, the authors describe a work world that is complex, often troubling, ultimately rewarding, but one that calls for more description and analysis by those who shape its belief systems, norms and cultural messages. Tom Peters notes in *Thriving on Chaos* (1989): *"The times do not permit timidity. They demand a new aggressiveness."* In their honesty, their willingness to offer up real experiences for discussion, and their commitment to exploring issues of race and ethnicity in Nevada's

school, the authors exemplify the new aggressiveness and character needed in school management today.

About Reflective Writing

How leaders think about change very much governs how they initiate it, manage it and respond to it (Sims, Gioia & Associates, 1986). It follows that professional development experiences for school leaders should include experiences designed to help them understand how their belief systems orient their management styles. Drucker reminds us (1977), *"The individual manager needs development just as much as the company [does]....He must acquire today the skills which will make him effective tomorrow. He needs an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of his own experience—and above all—an opportunity to reflect on himself and to learn to make his strengths count."*

In addition to the value of reflection for individual professional development, capturing the knowledge gained from on-the-job learning, and recording it in a form that makes the learning accessible to others, helps the educational field gain a broader understanding of the complexities of the school workplace. This practice is especially important for school administrators. Research suggests that this group learns most of what they know about their day-to-day responsibilities on-the-job (Schainker, 1989). Yet, the nature of their work is such that they have little time for reflection and few forums for sharing concerns and insights with colleagues.

"The individual manager needs development just as much as the company [does]....He must acquire today the skills which will make him effective tomorrow. He needs an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of his own experience—and above all—an opportunity to reflect on himself and to learn to make his strengths count."

By providing reflective writing experiences for its members and recording the writing to share with other administrators, Nevada Project LEAD has begun to build a literature about the actual workplace experiences of school leaders while providing a rich personal experience for the writers. The benefits are twofold: by participating in reflective writing retreats, the authors learn a process by which they are able to record their learning, reflect on their work and share with colleagues; and the narratives serve to prompt discussions among a broader group of educators about related workplace issues. Other administrators and teachers who have participated in reflective writing activities concur that they are professionally and personally beneficial (Glickman, 1990; Shulman, 1990; Nelson, 1989). By writing themselves, administrators avoid having their experiences interpreted—through a journalist or researcher, for example—preserving the administrator's interpretation of school work life, and affording the author-writer a chance to review his or her thoughts about important aspects of work. The process helps administrators to break through the isolation and fragmentation of the work world, encourages a habit of reflection

through personal writing and promotes a professional obligation to record knowledge about practice, much in the same way doctors and lawyers have developed case records as tools for learning.

The narratives in this book were produced through a series of half- and full-day reflective writing retreats. Project LEAD administrators of colour identified significant events in their careers that they felt merited sharing with colleagues. They wrote about those experiences, shared their writing verbally with colleagues, and revised their writing based on feedback from the sharing sessions. The reviews of the process by the authors affirmed Nevada Project LEAD's investment in writing for reflection a professional development tool. As one author commented: *"I had never talked about this experience with other administrators. I haven't felt comfortable opening up with colleagues about the thorny issues, or the puzzling ones—the ones that seem so big they take over my whole work life. I certainly didn't talk about how my ethnicity shapes my approach to work!"*

About the Authors

The Nevada Project LEAD Work Group for Administrators of Colour, while currently comparatively small, is likely to grow as Nevada's K-12 school population burgeons with new students who are increasingly diverse. The authors (African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Hispanics) were invited to help build a network of administrators of colour around the state, to provide a forum in which they might share insights and questions about their work. The rationale for this special work group is that, if most administrators feel isolation and fragmentation in their work (Bennis, 1990) then those of colour might feel especially so in a state where most of their colleagues in decisionmaking roles are Caucasian.

At first skeptical of the need for or relevance of such a group, the authors soon found important commonalities in their experiences and concerns. As one observed: *"This experience has been very important for me. I have learned about myself and about my work. Most important, I have found colleagues with whom I'll continue to share and learn."* They plan to expand the network as Nevada Project LEAD enters its third year in operation.

The contributing authors, six school principals and one district administrator, are not novice educators. All have been active in professional development associations and activities within their districts and the state. Together, they represent a combined total of nearly a century of experience in Nevada's urban and rural

schools, first as teachers and now as administrators. They affirm Nevada Project LEAD's decision to strengthen the network of administrators of colour. Through its work, LEAD has begun to establish a norm of colleaguial sharing and honest exploration of school leadership issues.

About the Title

Nevada Project LEAD was originally convened a Work Group for Minority Administrators. The authors changed the name of their group, and ultimately of this book, to "Administrators of Colour," in order that it might more aptly describe the evolving demographics of the United States as we approach the 21st century. Their message is that, while currently administrators of colour are a minority in schools today, in the near future, the broad range of non-Caucasians in our communities and in our schools will render the term 'minority' obsolete.

Who Might Use This Book

The immediate audience for *Reflections on Leadership by Nevada School Administrators of Colour* is other educators in Nevada's Project LEAD. The authors hope their narratives will promote dialogue among school leaders about areas of common interest. The narratives do not provide pat answers to leadership problems. They provide a departure point for broader discussions about problem identification and resolution. To that end, the book has many potential audiences. Teachers, parents, school board members, professional association leaders, and policymakers may all learn more about the day-to-day realities of school management in Nevada.

If there is an overarching message of the book, it is that educators can and should share openly questions, concerns, and experiences that effect not just the day-to-day operation of schools but the overall educational experience for Nevada's children. As one of the principals observed: *"I think it's time we talked openly about what is happening in our schools. Who knows better than administrators and teachers? And if we don't, who shall?"*

WHO DECIDES?

Dr. Myrna Matranga

"Who decides?" "Whoever is affected by the decision." A simple answer—but not a simple process. The administrative philosophy which puts this rhetoric into practice is cumbersome, tedious, complex, difficult to manage—but oh, so worthwhile to the health of an organization. For me, a healthy organization is an energized, exciting environment filled with interaction, debate, and good, solid inquiry—all of which is a part of the process of shared decision-making. This is the environment in which professionals grow and contribute in a mutual process of give and take. This is the environment in which professional judgement is sought and valued and in which we are all stakeholder. Idealistic? Perhaps.

For one thing the process of change has never been easy and the processes of shared decision-making require an incredible amount of hard work and commitment. In the first place, shared decision-making relies heavily on effective communication which, in turn, means more group and individual meetings, more perception checks, more feedback, more study, more analysis, more planning. . .more, more, more—added to an already hectic schedule. In this light, it's easy to perpetuate the status quo.

However, for those of us committed to the process of collaborative planning and shared decision-making, it's worth it. The benefits, as I see it, far outweigh the problems and include some of the following: improved staff morale, energized climate, positive effects on students, higher levels of professionalism and a sense of self-worth. The neat thing is that the process can be seen as a reward to teachers and a benefit to school districts and communicates something fundamentally important: mutual respect.

What follows are two examples which underscore the importance of involvement and good communication. In one, the process is a model threatened by external forces. But the forces of union involvement in school decision-making are very real in Nevada today and deserving of discussion. As Charles Kershner states in *Teacher Professionalism Through Labor Relations* (1986), *"Professionals can and do unionize. The real issue is what kind of organization do teachers need in order to professionalize and develop a structure that will link union organization with support for professional work roles."*

In the other narrative, the process of communication is sorely lacking. We hear from a principal who, in Bennis' terms (1990) is a "properly socialized dissenter," that is, one for whom resignation is a reasonable alternative when his voice in key aspects of his work life no longer is heard.

Together, the authors offer for consideration problematic experiences for which there are no easy answers. We are challenged by their forthright narratives to look again at the policies and practices that, however unintentionally, may be seriously hampering the leadership of some of our most talented administrators.

SITE-BASED DECISIONS OR UNION CONTROL: WHEN TEACHERS CLASH WITH UNION CONTRACTS

Imagine my shock when a union representative called one day and told me to discontinue our lunchtime detention program.

The 1,100 students at our school know that if they obey school rules they will be rewarded. If they choose to behave inappropriately, they are certain to receive a limit setting consequence. This is because the teachers and I (I'm the principal) have developed an extremely effective disciplinary program for students who break the rules. Teachers, parents, our many school visitors, just about everyone who stops by comments on how well-behaved and happy our students are. The lunchtime detention period, a key feature of our disciplinary program, has a lot to do with our ability to maintain the safe, friendly environment our children enjoy. Imagine my shock when the teachers' union notified me that we had to end the program! Here's what happened.

When our new school opened three years ago, the teachers unanimously wanted to make discipline a top priority. The teachers asked for and received training in effective classroom and school-wide discipline. From there we developed the lunchtime detention program. It has great appeal for the teachers. By rotating assignments among the entire faculty, teachers are responsible for supervising a lunchroom detention only one week a year. More importantly, the plan ensures a consistent, school-wide discipline policy for students who misbehave.[1]

For three years, the program has worked extremely well. We average approximately seven students a day in the detention room. On many days no students are detained. In a school of more than 1,000 students, we have had only two fights this year. In three years, only fourteen students have been sent to my office for disciplinary reasons.

I was stunned when a union representative called one day and told me to discontinue the detention program. While no one from the school had complained about the program, the union charged that teachers were violating the contract by doing a duty during their lunch period. I tried to explain that the teachers had developed this program on their own and participated in it on a voluntary basis. I offered to supply testimony from parents of the importance of this program to the overall success of our school. The union representative replied, *"I don't care. The contract says teachers can't volunteer for duty even if they want to. The teachers have to discontinue this program."*

I immediately called a staff meeting and informed my faculty. The teachers were outraged. *"How can they do this?" "This is our choice." "The union is not representing us, just their own interests. If we discontinue it, the students will see us as inconsistent and we'll lose a successful program."*

Teachers decided to fight the union's decision. They surveyed their ranks and found that thirty-eight out of thirty-nine teachers wanted to continue volunteering their time. I mailed the results of the survey, along with the teachers' written comments, to the union. I also added a note about how successful the program had been.

The teachers vowed not to give up any part of our management plan without a fight.

The union responded, *"We don't care if teachers are doing this on a voluntary basis. We don't care if children are well-behaved because you have a good management plan. We don't want teachers volunteering on their duty-free lunch hour. Other schools may want to do the same, and the union will look bad after having negotiated a free lunch period for teachers."* The union made its position clear: even though teachers volunteered only one week out of the school year, it would file a grievance against me if the program continued. I realized even raising the subject opened a further can of worms. The union also informed me that teachers could not voluntarily organize and play games with students during their free lunch hour.

Upset that the union was playing politics, the teachers vowed not to give up any part of our management plan without a fight. Many grumbled in the faculty room: *"This is political, the union is not representing us." "The union doesn't care about children." "We have to fight the union on this."* We decided to go ahead with the grievance procedure and let the case go to arbitration. Next, we invited the school district's Employment Management Relations Officer to meet with our staff. After hearing our concerns, he advised us to resolve the grievance at the first step, the school level, because if the grievance came to him, the second level, he would have to rule in favor of the union. The teachers told the officer that they wanted the grievance hearing anyway and that they would take their chances. (Many of us in the district believe that the Employment Management Relations Officer was hand-picked by the union during the recent school district reorganization. His behavior over the course of our grievance process lent credence to the rumor.)

Later, at a staff meeting, the teachers expressed their desire to attend the grievance hearing so that they could let the union know it was not representing them. I called the school district's attorney who advised me that the hearing was open to teachers. I relayed this information to my staff in a memorandum. A few days later, the union called me and said they had requested a closed hearing and that the teachers could not attend. They did not say why.

The next morning, I wrote a second memorandum to my staff stating, *"The union has requested a closed hearing and does not want the teachers to attend. I wonder why?"* The teachers assumed the union knew that the

teachers were going to let it know in no uncertain terms that they were not satisfied with its actions.

The union demanded that I write a letter of apology to my staff. I refused.

The union got hold of my memo and filed a complaint against me with the Employment Management Relations Board (EMRB). I apparently should not have asked, *"I wonder why?"* Supposedly, I made the union look bad to the teachers. The union demanded that I write a letter of apology to my staff. I refused. The teachers, who supported me completely, thought the union's request was ridiculous. The EMRB also agreed. They dismissed the request for the written apology as a frivolous case which would waste time and money to hear. The matter was dropped.

In the meantime, the teachers among themselves worked out a plan to maintain the noon-time detention by using specialists who were on a flexible double session to cover all detention duty. Under a separate contract, our specialists could supervise the detention room and still receive their duty-free lunch. Because the specialists believed so strongly in our program, they volunteered for noon-time detention for the remainder of the school year. That solved our immediate problem, but only temporarily. Next year, when our enrollment decreases because of rezoning, we will be taken off the flexible double schedule sessions. This means a different specialist schedule and no staffing for the lunchtime detention.

I find the inflexibility of the union a cause for great concern. In effect, the union, controlled by a few "generals," has put a contract issue before the welfare of children and the expressed wishes of our teachers. Further, its action contradicts the union's alleged support for school-site management and teacher empowerment. In attempting to protect the rights of teachers in many different settings, the union is disregarding the decisions of teachers in a particular site.

I have probably fared well during this negotiation compared to what other principals might have experienced.

As troubling to me as the time-consuming negotiations with people generally unacquainted with our school, is the hunch that I have probably fared well during this negotiation compared to what other principals might have experienced. I have the reputation in my district as an outstanding principal whose top priority is ensuring that all children receive the best education we can provide. When my

school opened in 1987, I received more than 250 applications for twenty-one positions. Teachers want to work for me because they know I am supportive, fair, and consistent. I have been recognized nationally for my contributions to education. In 1989, I was selected by the U.S. Department of Education as a National Distinguished Principal and was honored at the White House by President Bush. That same year, I received the Women of Achievement Award in Education by our local chamber of commerce. In this particular case, I believe I am a strong person whom the union decided to take on for political reasons. But that is a subject for another case study.

What I wonder is: what happens to less visible, less vocal, but equally competent principals when so strong an "outside force" attacks a successful teacher-developed program tailored to one school's particular needs?

ENDNOTES

1. There are many academically challenging, self-esteem building, cooperative programs in our school designed to validate student achievement. While I am writing about a disciplinary strategy, I hope you keep in mind that it is one of the support structures that helps us to expend most of our teaching energy on the many positive aspects of learning.

PRINCIPAL TRANSFERS: WHEN SHOULD PRINCIPALS HAVE A SAY?

My first realization that trouble might be brewing in my school came shortly before Christmas break when the music teacher asked me, "Have you heard that the district is planning to move all principals who have been in their schools for more than five years?" It took me only a few seconds to come up with the list of eight principals, including me, who would be affected by such a move.

The teacher's question was unexpected and troubling—unexpected because I had not heard the rumor, and troubling because the district had always followed the written transfer policy. (Our school administrators are not protected by a strong local or state negotiating unit. But then, we had never needed one.)

I am a veteran school administrator with 19 years experience. Prior to that, I had been a middle-school teacher for nine years. All tolled, I have been an educator in the same school district for 28 years. Currently, I serve in a middle-to-upper-middle income school with fewer than one per cent minorities in a student population of 640. With the exception of my current assignment, all my experiences have been in low-income schools. When rumors surfaced, the thought did occur to me that, being an African American, the district might be planning to reassign me to a low-income school, or one with more minorities.

The teacher's question was unexpected and troubling —unexpected because I had not heard the rumor, and troubling because the district had always followed the written transfer policy.

My concern that I might be reassigned was increasing. The school district grapevine was my only source of information. While I have never added rumors to the grapevine, and don't respond to them, my experience is that persistent rumors in our district are generally accurate, so accurate that I wondered if the transfer story had been leaked on purpose.

Several weeks after the music teacher's question, another teacher told me that her friend, who teaches at another school, heard that I was going to be transferred to PDQ School next year. Later, several parents, who had also heard this rumor, asked me if it were true. I was becoming more uneasy. Normally, principals initiate a request to transfer to other locations; even in involuntary transfers, the central administration notifies the principal of the pending move. In my case, neither of those things had happened.

In February, the rumor mill had identified the eight principals and the new school assignments. I had guessed accurately about who we were. A parent from another school remarked to me, *"I'm elated that you will be my son's principal next year."* Her source of information was supposedly one of our seven school board members.

By this time, I was convinced that the hearsay was true. My staff had also heard the rumors. Several cried at the prospect of my leaving. I was deeply touched by their concern. My own emotional state was one of controlled anger, at least on the outside. (A month later, I discovered that stress had triggered a borderline diabetic condition which I now must control with medication.) I was bitter and angry that this situation was causing such consternation among the faculty and community. In retrospect, I may have been most angry that with no way to substantiate the rumors and time marching on, my options were growing more and more limited.

I decided I would rather resign than involuntarily play musical chairs. This was a tough decision for me because I pride myself on being flexible, supportive, and fair. It was the fairness issue that pushed me over the edge.

When I questioned my superiors about the rumors, they gave me evasive and inconclusive answers. "We have made no firm commitments, but there is a possibility that some principals may be moved." These noncommittal remarks just added fuel to the fire.

I decided I would rather resign than involuntarily play musical chairs.

Another concern was my lack of options. Had we eight principals known earlier that the district wanted us to move, we could have chosen from among some schools. I knew of two principals who were retiring later in the year and two new elementary schools that were coming on line. In addition, voluntary transfers create a domino effect that leads to other school openings. But by the time the rumors were substantiated, these openings had been filled. We were left with no options.

I suppose when we are forced to take a stand, we have a new understanding of "loneliness" and "being alone." Although the other principals were in the same predicament, and although the majority of my staff and community supported me, I still felt insecure, vulnerable, and dispensable. After 28 years of "valued service," I realized that principals are really at the mercy of their superintendents and school boards.

At the end of May, the agenda for the next board meeting was published. It included an item pertaining to the transfer of some administrators. That same day, the superintendent's office called me to schedule an afterschool meeting in his office to discuss a transfer. I could no longer deny the rumors.

At that point, my anger was so great that I vowed to reject any move or compromise, even if it meant resigning. As it happened, our PTA president made a special trip to school that day to talk with me. Her

question was simple and direct, "What can we as parents do to help keep you at this school?" At that point, I began working through her to inform other parents that they should organize and lobby if they wished me to stay at this school.

By the next week, parents and teachers were preparing for what would surely be a showdown at the school board meeting. Emotions were running high. There was a flurry of telephone calls, petitions, talk of boycotts, and personal letters to the superintendent and individual board members. All the messages were the same: Don't transfer our principals.

On Tuesday I met with the superintendent. We were alone; no associate present. His first comment was, *"I guess you've heard that we're considering moving you to PDQ School."* We discussed my feelings about the school (the same one named in the rumors), and I asked why I had been chosen for that particular school. The superintendent answered, *"A move to an upper-income school would be professional growth for you."* I spoke freely about my resistance to changing schools and my displeasure with the way the situation was being handled. The meeting ended with a discussion of options. I remarked, *"Transferring is only one; my other option is to resign from the district."* The superintendent replied, *"You don't want to do that."*

Like the other principals, I, too, left the meeting with the superintendent without knowing what the 7 P.M. recommendation to the school board would be. I was assured that I would be informed prior to the board meeting.

The short ride home was stressful. Waiting for the telephone call was even more so. I became more tense and angry as time passed. 4:00 P.M., 5:00 P.M., 5:30 P.M. At 6:00 P.M. my wife answered a telephone call from the superintendent with the message, "It will be all or nothing (i.e., all eight of us will be transferred or all would stay put)." Unsure which way it was going to go, I prepared the letter of resignation I would hand deliver to the superintendent the next morning. The three-page letter outlined my reasons for resigning and my extreme dislike for the way the procedure was handled. My wife was nervous about the possibility of our losing my income in the next month. *"Do you have another job lined up?"* she asked. Of course, the answer was *"no."*

The meeting ended with a discussion of options. I remarked, "Transferring is only one; my other option is to resign from the district."

I did not attend the school board meeting. However, most of the other principals under consideration for transfer and more than 200 parents from our collective schools were present and ready to vocally oppose the moves.

At 11 P.M. I heard on the late night news that the administration had recommended that the eight administrators **not** be transferred. The recommendation was made without public discussion.

To this day, I am not clear why the superintendent or board decided not to follow the existing transfer policy. One guess is that in recent years less experienced principals have been systematically transferred. The strategy of secrecy could have been designed to ward off any attempt by the "final eight" to organize teacher or parent opposition. Or perhaps it was a superintendent/board agreement to move everyone "for the good of the district." Since no one discusses the incident, I don't think the principals will ever know for sure.

The recommendation was made without public discussion.

A year has passed and the issue is officially settled, but I am still searching for answers to an endless stream of questions: Should a school district institute transfers suddenly and secretly without soliciting input in advance from those principals being affected? Was this just an isolated incident in our district? Will it happen again? Was the proposal worth the bitterness, anger, and emotional stress we suffered? And what will be the lasting effects of the procedures followed in the proposed moves?

I am all for voluntary transfers. In fact, during my administrative years, I voluntarily sought and was granted principalships at three separate schools. I am not opposed to involuntary administrative transfers either. I believe schools boards are justified in using them to settle unresolved conflicts. But I am not in favor of involuntary transfers that are **not** related to conflict resolution.

Perhaps the answers lie in the procedures for executing involuntary transfers. Before transfers are developed and implemented, the individuals involved should have a chance to talk with the superintendent and board. I am convinced my experience would have been different had the district involved me in the decision-making process. Including the school staff and parents in the process could have helped to avoid the problems we experienced: bad press, low morale, school disruptions, and administrative conflict. As a matter of record, two of the eight principals voluntarily transferred to different schools. But, voluntary transfer is the subject of another narrative.

EDUCATORS OF COLOR: THEIR PRESENCE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Dr. Jerry Downing

The following three narratives clearly suggest the title of this section. These educators of colour *are* making a difference by their presence in Nevada schools, as research verifies. Albert Bondura (1976) made a career of studying the nature and impact of imitative learning. If our goal is to teach new behavior, there is little doubt that modeling of the desired behavior is the most powerful teaching tool. Modeling is even more apparent in the teaching of attitudes and value related concepts. The following material speaks for itself in terms of the power of a positive modeling process.

Does the presence of administrators of color really mean so much? Is it necessary for minority children to have a presence of their own ethnic background before them? The statements in this section suggest a strong affirmative view. A quick look at social learning research provides support for an obvious reason—**prestige**! Teachers and administrators of color carry with them face validity and are presenting it to the eyes of minority children.

The question remains, what behavior will administrators of any color model for children? These authors provide examples of appropriate behavior to model and of the timing necessary for greatest impact. The issue presented here is not so much of the role model concept, of minority persons in positions of importance, but of the presentation of appropriate behavior. This should be behavior from which children can positively model their own approach to life.

This material emphatically underlines the burden carried by *all* who would present themselves to children as examples to be imitated. For the school administrator of color that burden is apparent and constant. For, not only are the children watching for cues for their lives but the adults are watching the results of this test. And the benefits can be far reaching. Marion Wright Edelman comments about an experience in her book *Families in Peril*:

> The hostility of the outside world which told black children we were not worth much was buffered and countered by our families, schools, churches and mentors who affirmed our worth. . . . .We had teachers and other adult role models who said, 'You can achieve, and we believe in you.'

WHEN ACTIONS CALL FOR WORDS: THE BENEFITS AND PITFALLS OF BEING A VOCAL ADMINISTRATOR OF COLOUR

The opening of this particular school year was extremely difficult as it often is for most administrators in a metropolitan high school setting. A particular incident during lunch supervision that first week of school helped me become aware of the pivotal role I would play in the school as an advocate for Hispanic as well as newcomer students with the administration, community, and teachers. In order to understand the roots of the situation, I feel I must share my personal background, as well as a background about the school and the community where this incident took place. I hope that by sharing my experience it may help others in education understand. The incident took place at the PDQ High School.

The PDQ High School has experienced a tremendous change in its student population. These changes reflect the cultural make-up of the community it serves. PDQ High School was the first high school in the desert community which today is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. Many of the school's graduates are today's prominent businessmen and politicians. For several decades the student body population was predominantly white till the early sixties when black students began to be bussed as the result of the civil rights movement and the federal mandate to integrate the schools.

Later in the '70s, the school experienced a wave of new students, mostly first or second generation Mexican-American. The staff and administration continued to be all white except for a few blacks and one or two Hispanic teachers out of a total of 89 staff members. I found it very interesting to look through the school's yearbooks and see the history of the school and the changes in the student population. Today the minorities make up the majority of the school enrollment. These are students from 42 different countries, represented in the school student body. The staff very slowly is beginning to reflect the make-up of the community it serves.

My responsibilities as Assistant Principal were student activities, data processing, teacher evaluations for social studies, physical education, health, foreign languages, business and vocational. My main responsibility was to develop and implement an inter-language core program for the 150 non-English proficient speaking as well as to address the tremendous dropout problem among Hispanic students. Finally, I was in an educational setting that I had always hoped to be. I always felt that if given an opportunity, I could make a difference in the education of the Hispanic students. That's not to say that I feel less effective with non-Hispanic students but there is definitely a special bond with the Hispanic students. I have always recognized a deficiency in the educational system for these students.

The strong connection I feel with all non-English speaking proficient students is directly affected by my personal background.

My family left Cuba in the summer of 1961 because of political problems. Education has always been very important in my family. My father was a principal of a high school before we left the country. He was respected and well known in our country for being the head coach of the Cuban Olympic swimming team. As a young man he represented Cuba in the Olympics and received a silver medal. Up to the time we left Cuba, we had lived a comfortable middle class life style. As so with many victims of political conflicts beyond our control, my family decided to go to Miami for a few months until the problems settled and we could resume our life style in our homeland.

I am a product of the school district that presently employs me as an administrator.

When we arrived in Miami it was not so strange to us because after all, we were only 90 miles away from our island. Many of my family's friends were in the same situation, and the majority of us thought our stay in this friendly city was going to be something like a long vacation. I was too young to really understand the risk and difficult times that were ahead for my parents. The tremendous difficulties were financial as well as emotional.

For me Miami was great. I was bussed from our home to a very affluent neighborhood where I attended public school. All the students and teachers in the classes were Cuban. The teacher taught all the regular subjects in English but we were free to speak Spanish to each other.

At home things began to change. We had to ask for exile so that as refugees we could receive a monthly care package with the basic foods and one hundred dollars for expenses. We all lived in a one bedroom apartment, but it wasn't that bad because all our other friends were in the same situation. We knew it was for a short period of time before we could go back. History speaks for itself, and here I am, a 37 year old administrator for the school district in the same city that I had arrived as relocated Cuban refugee 2,700 miles away from my home. I have experienced and gone through a tremendous adjustment and assimilation process.

I am a product of the school district that presently employs me as an administrator.

I began school as a sixth grader. I was the only Cuban in the school. There were other students who looked Spanish but to my surprise did not speak Spanish. I found that I had as little in common with them as the other Americans. In class I sat in the

back of the classroom. It was left up to me to follow the classroom routine. The worst part of school for me was lunch and recess when I had to be by myself while my classmates played and ate together. I was not part of the group because of the language barrier. At home my father tried to make the best of a bad situation. After six years had passed, the family was beginning to realize that Castro wasn't going to be that easy to overthrow, and we finally bought a house.

My father continued to work for the gaming business until his death. My mother worked in a laundry and as a maid until she had a nervous breakdown and never really recuperated. She often talks about everything she left behind. Her father, mother, and two brothers passed away in Cuba, and she never had the chance to see them again.

The teachers would object to the non-English students being placed in their classes. "I already have 30 students, what am I to do if he doesn't speak English?"

To me, being in a position to help the children of the refugee families get assimilated to their new homes is a great deal more than just my responsibilities as administrator. Unfortunately other schools personnel saw these families in a different light. It was clear to me for example, that the office staff was bothered by the fact that these newcomers could not speak English and something as simple as registration became a major problem. "Why do so many come to school to register just one student?" "How am I supposed to feed the name in the computer cards?" "How do they expect a 17 year old to start high school?

The teachers would object to the non-English students being placed in their classes. *"I already have 30 students, what am I to do if he doesn't speak English?" "They can't even write in their own language; they understand and speak just fine when they are in the lunch room, but in class the act like they don't know what I'm saying."* Being extremely insensitive, one of the other administrators used the phrase, *"we should have killed them all when we were in Vietnam."* Often when I was talking to the student's parents in Spanish, office staff or teachers would make a comment like, *"speak English, you are in the United States now."* Of course not everyone in the school district showed this ignorance, only a few did and I learned not to react emotionally to these kinds of remarks.

My first year made me a "Super Star". I had the support of an excellent associate superintendent who had been my principal and immediate supervisor through my professional career. The district was putting money into a lot of different programs for "at-risk" students. Earlier that year the district implemented an inter-language core program which allowed students to learn the subject matter at the same time they learned English. The teachers I was able to select for

this particular program were excellent, and with their input, hard work and dedication we put together an outstanding program for the non-proficient English speakers. This not only helped the students, but also helped the moral of the teachers who were frustrated at not being able to help the non-English students in their classrooms. The district also gave us money to implement an Upper Bound program which identified minority students that we felt would benefit being placed in advance classes.

We again selected master teachers in English and math and identified a counselor who monitored the students progress in more advanced classes. The parents and students attended parenting classes, study skills, self-esteem and other programs through the year. For the Hispanic students we developed and implemented a bilingual class where the Spanish speakers were able to do advanced work to prepare them for advanced placement tests. The interesting outcome of this program was that some of the students who had the reputation of being gang members and "slow," turned out to have excellent writing skills which they transferred to the other English classes.

Again the teacher involved in this program put many extra hours in. She had to develop the program with help of the foreign language professor at the university. The school had more students scoring higher in the Spanish Advance Placement Test than in the English test the third year this program was in existence. The Hispanic students, as well as the other students in the core program were encouraged to take part in the school's extra-curricular activities.

The interesting outcome of this program was that some of the students who had the reputation of being gang members and "slow," turned out to have excellent writing skills which they transferred to the other English classes.

New clubs were created and that would enable the non-English speaking student to feel that they were part of the school. They participated in recreational field trips, such as Disneyland, picnics to the lake, parks, etc. The teachers, counselors and myself shared in the responsibilities of these extra-curricular activities. The parents were invited to take part in special international rights assemblies, trips to the university, colleges and vocational schools in the area. Parents were kept informed of students progress and school activities in a newsletter written in their native language whenever this was possible.

To maintain their cultural interest and students were encouraged to share their diversity in their classroom assignments, assemblies and special school programs. The staff was involved in a number of multi-cultural inservices to help them better understand the

needs of the students. Because of these inservices the staff began to see themselves as specialists in multi-cultural education.

The Hispanic community focused its attention on our school. The Latin Chamber of Commerce came up with several programs such as career day and scholarship funds. Hispanic staff members at the university level established a mentorship program with the university students and our students.

I happened to be at the right place at the right time. I was the first Hispanic female administrator in a high school setting. As I reflect, I did not realize I was a minority until the school district made me aware of the fact.

I was at an inservice for administrators and the issue being discussed was affirmative action and the speaker was showing a chart of the number of minority administrators in the different departments. The chart showed only one Hispanic female in high schools. Someone next to me pointed out that number one was me. Up to that point I had always felt my record spoke for itself when I had promotions. Unfortunately the more the district central office spoke of affirmative action the more tension it brought me. Today I feel things are really out of hand as far as the negative feelings and the morale of the district regarding this issue.

As I reflect, I did not realize I was a minority until the school district made me aware of the fact.

Personally I'm glad I was first hired as a teacher because of my qualifications and not my ethnicity. I continued my education in the counseling field because I felt it could help bridge the gap between the school and the Hispanic community. I didn't have any interest in becoming an administrator but was encouraged, push-push-and-push by all my supervisors to become an administrator. I like to think that most of their encouragement was based on my training and experience. Unfortunately many people look at me and I'm sure they assume it's my ethnicity that got me the position as an administrator. That's their problem. I know the district needs to meet their quotas. If I allow myself to be used by the district then it becomes my problem. I have turned down a number of positions that have been offered because they did not interest me. I am sincere in wanting to work with Hispanic students because of my ethnicity not because of affirmative action!

Most of my rewards have come from my students mentioning how I've helped them. During graduation speeches or at awards assemblies. They get nervous and like myself our accents get really bad when we are emotional. I remember every single one of the students that has given me acknowledgement during public speaking. The

kisses and hugs after a special cultural program that the students and I put together for assemblies show how we are more expressive in our feelings. The guys offer me their chairs when I have lunch duty, the girls thank me at the prom or homecoming dances for talking to their parents to allow them to attend the dance. I know my father would not allow me to go to school dances or on a date but when the parents know I'll be at the dance and then it's O.K., it's family. The Hispanic community also gave me encouragement. The Spanish newspaper frequently had articles about programs in our school under my supervision The members of the Latin Chamber of Commerce helped me get jobs for our students, also invited the students and myself to special events and monthly luncheons. During community events speakers often acknowledged the work I was doing at the PDQ High School. I also received recognition from the district.

The more successful the different programs become, the more encouraged I became. Si Se Puede!!!

I took part in committees, gave inservices, was sent to attend conferences and was given an opportunity to go through different areas of the country recruiting teachers. Together with the support of the community, school district, teachers and other administrators we began to see positive results from the students. The Hispanic students enrollment at the local university increased about fifty per cent. The school elected its first Hispanic student body president. Hispanic student involvement went up in the honors classes. There were Hispanic student representation in team sports, band and other extra curricular activities. Our school was given the "Excellence of Education" award and recognized as one of the top 200 schools in the United States. The more successful the different programs become, the more encouraged I became. *Si Se Puede!!!*

One day I heard the principal say, *"You bunch of gangsters up against the wall. Don't give me this bull you don't speak English, I know you understand me!"* He continued to shout and he asked the students to get up and put their hands up against the wall (like a police officer would do to a person suspected of a criminal act). *"Is he talking to us?", "What is he saying?", "Who is he mad at?", "What did we do?",* the students were asking, some speaking in English and some in Spanish. The dean and I looked at each other in shock. We had both been standing next to the students in question and they had not been involved in any wrong doing during our supervision. The other administrators were just as shocked as we were.

The bell rang and the other students refused to leave the cafeteria. About 300 students hung around to see what all the shouting and

yelling was all about. The principal continued yelling at the students with their hands up against the wall. He said, *"I know you speak English so don't play that damn game with me. I am not going to allow you bunch of hoodlums to run the school."* He continued to address these students as if they were terrible gang members. Finally, after a lot of effort, we were able to dismiss the crowd and send the students back to their classrooms.

I was furious. I knew the students that the principal had confronted were innocent. I wasn't the only one who knew the principal was absolutely wrong. I was sure that the rest of the counselors and administrators felt the same way I did. The principal finally walked away and the rest of us talked to the students and tried to calm them down by explaining that the principal was under a lot of pressure and they should just go to class and forget the incident. Of course the students didn't take it that well. As usual the adults had lunch together after the students went to class. All of us sat speechless at the table. Finally the principal broke the silence to remind us of the scheduled meeting after school.

After our lunch, several of us walked together back to our offices and commented on how inappropriate the principal's action had been. Later, during our scheduled administrators' meeting, I questioned the principal about the incident in the cafeteria. *"I need to tell you that I didn't think you acted very professional as a responsible role model. I think you owe the students an apology."* He responded by telling me that based on past experiences he recognized those students as trouble makers. He wanted to put a stop to any problems at the beginning of the year.

I was furious. I knew the students that the principal had confronted were innocent.

I informed him that those students had done nothing wrong. *"Mr. Johns, you were there with me, tell him did any of those students do anything wrong?"* Mr. Johns confirmed that they had not.

The principal ignored this remark. *"You are very naive. I know these students better than you do,"* he stated.

Later while I was in my office a couple of the other administrators came by. *"You know how he gets during registration. It's better if you try to forget what happened. You can't change him. That's the way he is."*

They went on to say that he was an excellent administrator, one of the best they had worked with, but he had to have some things his way. I agreed that he was a good administrator but he had made a mistake. He owed the students an apology. I didn't care whether he was the principal or not.

The weekend following the incident I had lunch with a friend. She asked me how school was going. I told her I had had a terrible experience and made the mistake of letting her know about the incident at school involving the Hispanic students. This friend worked for juvenile court services and had been very helpful in the past in working with a number of the Hispanic student's families. Unknown to me, at a meeting the following Monday with a group of Hispanic leaders in the community, she mentioned the incident in the high school. This group decided to make it a political issue. They called the superintendent of the school district. The superintendent called my principal, demanding an explanation. Of course, my principal called me into his office. *"I can't believe you would do this to me. I just received a call from the superintendents office. He demands that I correct this situation with the Hispanic community immediately."*

I explained that it had not been my intention to get the community leaders involved and told him about my conversation with my friend. After about two hours, he agreed to talk to the students involved. I agreed to write a letter to the community leaders as well as to the superintendent explaining that the situation had been resolved with the students and that this one incident should not erase all of the positive things going on with our students.

The whole matter finally came to a close after a lot of communication among the principal, Hispanic community leaders, the superintendent and myself. From the experience, I learned first of the influence of the "interest" group in the community on the schools. In the following four years we worked together to help meet the needs of the students of our diversified student population with great success.

It had not been my intention to get the community leaders involved

As I look back today, I can see that both the principal and I learned a great deal from each other. As I hope readers understand from the examples given earlier of my experiences working at this school, it was the highest point of my career. As a teacher, counselor, dean, and now a building principal, I feel that I can relate to all students, but cannot deny that a very special bond exists with the students that I worked with at PDQ High School. This special bond is the result of my own personal background and experiences. I believe the most important factor is the language barrier that we as Hispanics have to overcome.

We shared the struggles that our parents had to face making a new life in a new country. Often students and I shared stories about being raised in a country with different values, dating habits

and problems that our families had to overcome in a new country. It is difficult to explain how my experiences in working with these students are so different from dealing with students at other school settings. But I feel they are valuable and validating to students who are often looked at as "minorities."

THINKING IN COLOR: LEARNING TO VALUE THE GIFT OF MY ETHNICITY

The education of language minority students, though not a new topic in American education, is still hotly debated and politically charged. Twenty years after the passage of legislation dealing with the education of limited-English proficient (L.E.P.) students, the mandates in many cases have neither been accepted in spirit nor letter. I had not realized the extent of the resistance until recently, when, immersed in the education of L.E.P. students, I was forced to deal with some difficult issues—issues that involved how I perceived my own role in the education of L.E.P. students.

As I look back over my twenty-year career, I find I have come full circle: I began my career and, perhaps, will end it, in this highly controversial area. As a graduate of a minority university in the late '60s, I was neither fully aware of nor concerned about the Civil Rights Movement. When I was recruited and hired for my first teaching position in a South Central urban school district, I could not conceive that my ethnicity was a factor. I did not consider myself a minority.

I was surprised to learn that I had been hired as the "bilingual, multicultural music teacher" at an inner-city "barrio" elementary school. I remember being confused and somewhat insulted when my colleagues would ask, *"What do you like to be called, 'Chicana,' 'Mexican,' or 'Mexican-American?'" I remember proudly responding, "My name is..."*

I jumped into teaching and even managed to teach a few Mexican folk dances and a verse of "Cuando Caliente El Sol." The students, parents, and administrators seemed happy with me. I was invited to the homes of many students for special events, or just a cup of coffee. I felt proud that I was doing a good job at what I had been trained and hired to do—teach music.

I remember being confused and somewhat insulted when my colleagues would ask, "What do you like to be called, 'Chicana,' 'Mexican,' or 'Mexican-American?'" I remember proudly responding, "My name is..."

During this period, I also worked with L.E.P. adults. I heard them talk of their frustrations, hopes, and dreams, but I never got too involved; after all, this was not an experience I could relate to: I had not had to learn English as a second language. I had not been punished for speaking Spanish on the playground. I had not been retained or placed in special education because of my language. But now I saw students who were and heard their parents' pain that this happens.

After two years, I returned to school to become trained in special education. Instead of finding answers to the many questions I had about L.E.P. students, the special education program only diverted my attention from them.

Several years later, as an elementary school principal, I became aware of an appalling situation. A classroom for L.E.P. students was being denied basic instructional materials—meaning paper by pencil—by the program's school principal. After much justifying and "putting it in writing," I requested that the program be moved to my school.

The program functioned quite adequately in its new home. The teacher was effective, and the students, well-behaved and motivated, seemed to be learning. I congratulated myself on having "saved" these students from a sentence of educational neglect. Although I knew there were problems in the public school system for minority and second-language learners, I told myself I was doing all I could for my students.

As principal, I found myself increasingly accepting institutional explanations for students' successes and failures.

As principal, I found myself increasingly accepting institutional explanations for students' successes and failures. While I felt extremely conscientious and willing to "go the extra mile" for the kids, I also tolerated the status quo and ignored situations that could have been corrected. I saw the minority drop-out rate soar, yet I did not interpret it as a symptom of an inadequate educational system.

More recently, I accepted a transfer to direct a Second Language Programs Unit. Although I was excited by the prospect of a new experience, my colleagues made negative comments about the "mess" I had inherited. I quickly learned that my every action, regardless how small, was controversial.

Initially, my appointment was questioned as being in violation of the district's promotion and transfer policy. Nonetheless, I spiritedly moved into my new assignment only to find a staff embroiled in jealousy and in-fighting. Staff members were not on speaking terms with one other and were not welcome in certain district schools. Schedules and job assignments were nonexistent or ignored.

As I visited school sites and talked with teachers, I felt their frustration at the lack of administrative support for the L.E.P. program. Because principals and district administrators were often unaware of the program's guidelines, procedures, and goals, many L.E.P. students were not receiving an equitable education in overcrowded classrooms with teachers who lacked training, appropriate materials, and resources. Their parents were disillusioned and declined to come to meetings concerning their children because they felt the school offered little that would help them understand and participate in their child's learning.

As I analyzed my task, my first priority was planning and scheduling inservice trainings for teachers, parents, and administrators.

Generally well attended, the inservices still generated comments beginning, *"We want ..."* and *"You need to ...!"* My second priority was to get the Second Language Programs Unit into the "mainstream." With the cooperation of the assistant superintendents of the district's major divisions, we won approval of a proposal outlining a formula for restructuring the allocations of the Second Language Programs Unit. This proposal allows the unit to better serve its students by allocating teachers to second-language learners based on their numbers.

The plan is not without its critics. Educators who are well-intended, but misguided, offer objections that seem more self-serving than educationally sound. They continue to present arguments about the program's design that have nothing to do with what the research tells us.

It is uncertain what lies ahead in educating L.E. P. students in our country. I intend to continue developing my district's programs based on proven educational practices, not emotional, political rhetoric. I will continue working for what I believe best serves students, and I will take some shots along the way.

No longer will I ignore or tolerate situations I know are wrong, nor will I be intimidated by others who have far less understanding and experience with L.E.P. families.

I am certain that "well-intentioned" educators such as myself only slow educational reform. Yet, no longer will I ignore or tolerate situations I know are wrong, nor will I be intimidated by others who have far less understanding and experience with L.E.P. families. Criticism comes easy, and change comes hard; education would be better off if this phenomenon were reversed.

Now I continue my career where it began, as a Hispanic female. Because of my ethnicity, I have had experiences I neither pursued nor was trained for. These experiences have helped me grow professionally and personally. I am grateful for them. I am proud to be an educator of color working with L.E.P. students. In contrast to the early days of my career, I am aware how important it is for educators like me to be here for our children of color.

MENTORS COUNT: TWO WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

Monday morning starts with my rushing to school to prepare my schedule for the day. At 7:05 I sit at my desk drinking the first cup of coffee and reflect on why I am putting myself and my family through this experience. It is the first week in December, and I need time to prepare for finals which will allow me to finish my Master's in Educational Administration, time to prepare my varsity basketball team for a tournament, time to meet with Mrs. D to discuss her son's behavior, time to spend with my family. These responsibilities weigh heavily on my mind.

Why did I turn down the job offer I received this past summer from a government contractor? I would have almost doubled my present salary, and, most assuredly, I would not be living the hectic life I've had for the past two years. WHY?

It all started when I worked as a teacher's aide in a Colorado elementary school and realized, to my surprise, how much I enjoyed knowing that I could make a small difference in a young child's life. Now, some ten years later, sitting here in my rural Nevada school, that time seems far away.

I spent the first twenty years of my life in a small town in South Central Colorado. I was a young Chicano gang member who had little, if any, respect for authority, and authority had little, if any, respect for me, my family, or the members of my community. That was fine with me. I wanted to be seen as a tough member of my group.

The school system let me know at an early age that I could not accomplish anything. I was a "taco vendor" who hung around with other "tacos" and who would eventually wind up on the streets, in jail, or, if I were lucky, accept my station in life. This was not written in the school code or officially accepted by any city governing agency, but if you were a young, poor minority student in the '60s, you knew it.

The school system let me know at an early age that I could not accomplish anything.

Like most Chicano students, I was content following a general course of study that did not challenge my mental capacities. That was fine with me and most of "my people." At that time, my goal in life was to make sure everyone knew I did not back down from anyone. I could be counted on in a fight. By the end of my sophomore year in high school, after proving myself in clashes between my people and others, my status had grown to the point where I was now included in all the major decisions that affected my people. By age seventeen, I was considered by all, including rivals, as my people's chief negotiator.

The brotherhood that was so strong in those times is still with me today. Sometimes I miss it, and that scares me. How does a young, poverty-stricken minority leave this mentality behind him? What

broke me away from this bond? I suspect many things; some I had no control over, others I did.

An important part of my evolution from tough guy to school administrator came from role models. Some were real, or, I should say, real in my world. Others were so far from my actual existence that only their ideals and convictions affected me. I would like to tell you about two of the people whom I admired and copied and from whom I still gather strength.

Joe and his wife, Mrs. J., were respected members of my community. Both, in their own ways, influenced my life. But Joe is my role model.

When I was sixteen, I was confronted by three members of a rival gang in my science class. After an exchange of words, we started to fight. We were quickly separated by the teacher who smiled as he led me and one of my rivals to the assistant principal's office. We both knew what that smile meant.

An important part of my evolution from tough guy to school administrator came from role models.

The assistant principal was also the varsity football coach, and, as everyone in the community knew, he was "The Man" at school. He had a way of dealing with rival gang members that we all feared. He took them to the girls' P. E. class and made them fight each other until one begged his rival not to hit him, or someone got hurt. The embarrassment of begging not to be hit or kicked in front of fifty or more girls was so great that we didn't beg—and resorted to beating one another instead.

This day, as we squared off in front of the girls and a few selected coaches, something happened that, for a short time, ended this established practice. Joe, a first-year teacher, pushed his way through the circle of girls and looked at me, and then at my much larger opponent. He turned to the assistant principal, put his finger on his chest, and, pointing at me, said, *"If this boy gets hurt, you're going to deal with me in front of this class."* Then, looking at the other coaches with disgust, he left the room.

The outcome of the fight has little value for me today, but Joe does. For the first time, I saw a teacher—a white teacher—stand up to "The Man" and challenge his leadership. For me, a young Chicano hood, that confrontation left a deep impression. My feelings for Joe started to grow.

A few days later, I met Joe in the hall. I was too proud to ask him why he had been concerned about me, but he knew what I was thinking. He walked up to me, and, in his own rough way, said,

"You have spirit and potential. You can be more than you think. Don't let your environment control you."

I will never forget Joe's bold gesture of concern for me that day, or his subsequent inquiries, suggestions, and guidance. Joe was and still is my role model. I still see some of his behaviors in my actions in school.

I will never forget Joe's bold gesture of concern for me that day, or his subsequent inquiries, suggestions, and guidance.

But role models can be powerful for you even if you have not met them personally. I have never met Mohammed Ali, but he is very real in my world. He taught me that even though my skin may be darker, I am someone. He made me see that I did not have to apologize for my heritage, for my culture. Instead, I should be proud of it and learn more about it. I can succeed with hard work because I am not different.

Mohammed taught me that if you believe in something, nothing matters more than those convictions. No matter what the cost, if you can be truthful to yourself and stand up for your beliefs, you can face the world.

Ali was a great role model for young people in the '60s, but he was a special mentor to poor minorities. He gave us pride, beauty, and strength. I thank him for that. I believed in him and drew from his strength to learn about my own.

Today I look back, proud of my accomplishments. I am thankful I found special people along my path from poverty to professionalism who could and did provide inspiration and help along the way, people who in their own ways prevented the cultural mentality of poverty in my early world from swallowing me up and stopping my growth.

I am now a school principal, thanks to two mentors who made a difference.

CHANGING ENTRENCHED SYSTEMS: MORE GUTS THAN GLORY

Dr. Herschel L. Williams

George S. Counts established the precedent setting challenge in his 1960s book *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?* Vincent Harding echoed this challenge when he said *"create in our children, our young people, our adults, a commitment to the process of beginning to ask new questions, seek new answers about themselves, their schools, their nation and their world...and this in turn will bring about creative dissatisfaction with what is and lead to help create the next stage of the struggle for a more humane, more just, and a more truly democratic society."* These early protestations were all related to the need to bring about change in a system so blatantly entrenched that it no longer performed the functions for which it was designed.

In pondering the issues raised in "Changing Entrenched Systems: More Guts than Glory," I am compelled to emphasize the fact that the history of the American educational system, if examined closely, is replete with reform efforts, turning points, and grave challenges. Today's entrenched systems can lay claim to the same set of conditions that prompted Jones and Stout (1960) to declare that it is doubtful if there has ever been a period in the history of American education when the need for public understanding and support of our public schools has been greater. This same need for understanding and support is more urgent today at a time when many forces for social change are being applied to the schools, when a generation gap has developed, when public school financial support is at an all time low, and when politics and bureaucracy tear at the very foundation of the American educational system.

The two case studies that follow are perfect examples of what effective schooling research continues to support -- that a strong leader can make a difference by first exhibiting leadership and then focusing on those aspects of the school program that require change.

If we are really committed to effecting change, we must be willing to confront the real issues with uncompromised determination. We must make certain that we empower ourselves to the extent that we become the most effective agents for bringing about educational improvement. We must redefine education to mean an education that promotes humanism, and one that is responsive to all people, regardless of socio-economic status, race, creed, color, or national origin. We must be willing to take on the arduous task of reeducating teachers, who rule classes by sheer force of will, to teachers who nurture creativity, are caring, concerned, and have

the requisite skills and abilities to promote success in all youngsters. We must be willing to create a partnership with parents and the community at large so that parent and community support is a natural occurrence that issues from purposeful involvement in the school process.

There is ample cause to have hope. A re-examination of our history reveals many positive outcomes that attest to man's ingenuity, his adaptability, his capacity for choice making, and his responsibility for action and change. The two case studies serve as irrefutable evidence that with vision and "guts", change can occur. The authors exemplify the kind of leadership Bennis (1990) advocates: *"Leaders are able to recognize the truth and convey it whether they want to or not.... Leaders do not avoid, repress, or deny conflict, but rather see it as an opportunity."*

AN AFRICAN AMERICAN IN COWBOY COUNTRY

In March 1981, I was appointed principal of a junior high located in what locals call "cowboy country." In its thirteen-year history, the school had had only two principals. I was the third, and the first African American.

The student body was 90 per cent Caucasian, and parents of African-American students informed me that their children had been subjected to harsh disciplinary action, verbal abuse, corporal punishment, and immediate suspension by the dean of students without due process. In the year prior to my formal assignment to the school, the Associate Superintendent of Secondary Education had directed me to spend half days at this junior high until the end of the school year (splitting time between my current and future work sites). Although it was difficult attending to both schools, the experience was valuable to me. The junior high principal had proclaimed himself a "lame duck" and deferred all decisions and teacher queries about the upcoming school year to me. In that time, I became painfully aware of the school's problems.

The school had the reputation of being run by union-affiliated teachers. These teachers had apparently kept the previous principal in check by threatening to file grievances while resisting his leadership. Teachers were not engaging in curriculum preparation and were not required to follow district curriculum guides. Although the school was in poor financial condition, certain teachers were authorized to purchase supplies and equipment without concern for limited budgets or the priority needs of the school.

Students were trashing the school, and the custodians couldn't care less. There was graffiti in all the corridors, holes in the walls, the carpet was soiled, discolored, and torn.

It was readily apparent that the previous principal had ignored leadership duties. As a result, teachers taught "by the seat of their pants." Lesson plans were mythical. My reports for my records carefully recorded my concerns: teachers used ineffective instructional strategies and techniques. Students were unruly and ignored dress code and tardy regulations. Fights between students occurred frequently, and the failure rate was high for all students whether their records indicated average or below-average performance. While I recorded that the school facility had been vandalized by students and improperly maintained by the custodial staff, what I thought was that students were trashing the school, and the custodians couldn't care less. There was graffiti in all the corridors, holes in the walls, the carpet was soiled, discolored, and torn.

My initial meeting with the teachers was held in a terraced lecture room. This put me in the awkward position of having fifty-five potentially hostile teachers peering down on me as I spoke. From

the teachers' facial expressions, body language, and way of reading my handouts, I knew they were not happy with my new guidelines, procedures, or underlying message that things were going to change. They weren't happy but I forged ahead.

My initial priority was to improve the appearance of the school. The custodian and I identified areas that needed work and asked the district maintenance division to complete the repairs before the school reopened in the fall.

It was not pleasant to read about myself or my school in our neighborhood papers!

I devoted the summer to preparing for the teachers and students' return. I was overwhelmed with anxiety and excitement as I wondered what their reactions would be to the new policies and regulations regarding teacher curriculum planning, discipline procedures, restricted use of films and filmstrips, and dress code and tardy policies.

The majority of the teachers accepted the changes, but ten resisted and tried to undermine my efforts to change conditions at the schools. They filed a series of grievances charging that some of my regulations violated the agreement the teachers had negotiated with the school district. As each grievance was ruled in my favor, I reaffirmed my authority and my commitment to moving ahead with my objectives. When the resistant teachers did not receive satisfaction through the grievance process, they began a letter-writing campaign to school board members and newspapers claiming that my new policies interfered with the academic freedom of teachers. It was not pleasant to read about myself or my school in our neighborhood papers!

I was under great pressure, but I knew I had to stand firm to demonstrate to the supportive teachers that I would not waver in my leadership, and to the resistant teachers that I was determined to enforce my policies and regulations. I struggled to maintain a professional attitude and keep my anger from causing me to retaliate against the resistant teachers. I hoped my supporters would see my authority and leadership strengthen in the midst of the turmoil within the school. I quickly learned to value the support of my secretary, who informed me of lounge talk and other information she gathered about the concerns and complaints of teachers and staff.

To maintain control, I had to be highly visible. When I observed teachers performing below my expectations, I immediately advised them to correct the situation. This approach created anxiety for teachers and staff who failed to understand my purpose. In the first four years, I continually advised teachers about how to write

goals and objectives. These written communications proved to be valuable back-up when grievances were filed against my policies.

Personnel matters continued to occupy a great portion of my administrative time. The Assistant Principal, who had previously been a principal of an institutional school, was unfamiliar with a regular school setting and had to be told what to do daily. I could not trust his judgment as he often created additional problems with teachers, students and parents which were left to me to resolve. After several examples of his inability to handle routine matters, I rewrote his job description and limited his responsibilities to facilities, athletics, and student activities. But I was without the assistant principal I desperately needed to help me plan programs and tackle problems.

The Division of Secondary Education added to my personnel problems by assigning a counselor to our school who had recently settled a legal suit against the school district for discrimination. I argued with the "powers that be" to rescind the placement, but was told it was final, to make the best of it. As I expected, this counselor was not accepted by the other counselors, and, almost immediately, I had to intercede in their conflicts. More devastating to me, I began to feel that no one in the central office was concerned about the additional burden they had placed on me.

I also had problems with the Dean of Students. He had been at the school for four or five years and resented that he had not been promoted to the assistant principal position. He constantly bragged about his administrative abilities and the support he was giving me, while, in point of fact, he was having early morning breakfasts with the resistant teachers. After two years, I encouraged him to transfer or return to the classroom. But they were two long years without the help of someone who I felt could handle that job without constant supervision.

More devastating to me, I began to feel that no one in the central office was concerned about the additional burden they had placed on me.

In the fifth year, I recognized a pivotal change in my relationships with the teachers. The improvement was due, in part, to the fact that many of the resistant teachers had transferred to other schools and twenty-five new teachers had joined the faculty.

However, teacher morale had gradually improved in spite of the resistant teachers' efforts to create a climate of strife. The majority of teachers began to see me as a positive force as I responded to their individual needs. Morale got even better when I involved teachers in making decisions about issues that directly affected their classrooms.

The majority of teachers now ignore the nay-sayers and do not allow the negative attitudes and constant complaints to affect morale.

Slowly, I was able to relax my rigid, take-charge leadership style and assume a more trusting and complimentary one. I was finally able to take a "let's discuss this and examine options" approach with the teacher, without spawning staff battles and union grievances.

Still on my mind is a great idea I thought would work in my third year. I had tried to implement a flip-flop or reversal of the daily schedule for teachers and students. From the beginning, several teachers had difficulty adjusting to the changing schedule. As their numbers increased, I had to decide whether or not to continue this reversed schedule in the coming year. The matter was put to a vote, and by a slim margin, the teachers chose to return to the old schedule. We did. This was the teachers' first experience in resolving a troubling situation by sharing the responsibility for the decision. Their success and my willingness to honor "the majority" boosted morale and their sense of professionalism.

Now five years from those first wary days, I began to see light at the end of the tunnel. With relief and not a little satisfaction, I saw that we had accomplished most of the goals and objectives I had identified at the beginning of my principalship. I think we succeeded because teachers finally realized that we could share a vision about making our school a great place in which children to learn: safe, friendly, with high expectations for them and for ourselves.

Thinking back, I think I survived to see our success because I had a realistic picture of the school's problems right from the beginning. I knew it would be difficult to turn this school around. It was necessary to keep my focus on our long-term school goals and objectives, even when the school was experiencing day-to-day, internal turmoil. Maintaining a positive attitude, a firm hand, and consistent expectations were important in effecting change—even though the constant struggles, year after year, extracted every ounce of patience, tolerance, and humor I could muster.

I was not totally successful in all my aims. For example, I have not persuaded the remaining resistant teachers to transfer or buy into our program. However, the majority of teachers now ignore the nay-sayers and do not allow the negative attitudes and constant complaints to affect morale.

I've been writing about a change in teacher attitudes but our progress hasn't been limited to staff. I have begun to receive compliments from parents along with a growing number of requests for student attendance variances to enroll in our school. We also have a School Improvement Committee that includes teachers, students, parents

and staff. Overall, I feel proud of my success at this school. When I reflect on the tough years and the fears, anger, and anxiety I experienced, I can say it was all worth it. I also want to caution those who talk somewhat blithely about "the principal as leader" and "turning around a school." Establishing your leadership position and seeing the "turn around" can take a long, long time.

In summary, the learning experiences I believe are most worth sharing with fellow principals trying to bring about changes in their schools are:

1. Present consistent and firm leadership.
2. Have clear, measurable goals and objectives for improving the quality of teaching and student learning.
3. When resistance rises, attempt to identify its origin and the teachers involved. Meet with them to discuss their concerns. In most instances, differences will not be rooted in education philosophy but in resistance to change.
4. Reassure supportive teachers that school goals and objectives are firm.
5. Avoid devoting too much time and attention to resistant teachers.
6. Try to maintain a long-term perspective and find a friend to whom you can talk honestly on days whey you either talk or walk out. I found that person. Neither of us have walked out.

Establishing your leadership position and seeing the "turn around" can take a long, long time.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: ATTACK ON MULTIPLE FRONTS AND VICTORY WILL BE YOURS...IN A FEW YEARS.

For a decade, PDQ School served its community without much fanfare. With fewer than 450 students in grades seven and eight, it was one of the smallest junior high schools in the district.

When PDQ was built, the area was largely undeveloped. By the end of the decade, the school was surrounded by "starter homes." To accommodate nearly 1,000 students, the school added twelve permanent classrooms, two portables, and hired twelve new teachers.

The neighborhood was primarily middle to lower-middle class white, with approximately 5 per cent minority families. PDQ's student population, however, was 20 per cent minority due to court mandated busing. The school had two principals in its first ten years, both of whom retired after this assignment. I was the school's first minority administrator. Only 4 per cent of its teachers were minority. (Five years later, I have increased the percentage of minority teachers to 19 per cent.

The school population continued to grow. In five years, 500 new students entered PDQ. Rezoning to hold the school population below 1400 students succeeded only in slowing growth for a year. By then, 75 per cent of the students rode buses to and from school, some from as far as 17 miles away—in an urban area! In the meantime, the school staff had expanded to 100 employees, including 71 teachers.

When I became principal, problems confronted me from all directions. The facility was in deplorable condition. Walls were covered with graffiti, outdoor athletic fields were brown from lack of care, benches were vandalized, beer bottles and cans were strewn everywhere, and shrubbery was overgrown. Inside, the walls, painted a "hodge-podge"of colors, had holes kicked into them. In my first walk-through of the facility, I could not help but find my well-polished shoes covered with a layer of dust.

District surveys indicated that community confidence was low. The year before I was assigned to PDQ, the area superintendent had received more than 100 complaints from parents. The complaints were related to issues of racism and discrimination, poor communication, and unprofessional conduct by teachers towards students. Not surprisingly, discipline was also a problem. Thirty-six per cent of all office referrals for discipline were minority students. An inordinately high percentage of students referrals were from the special education classes. A special education teacher had been assigned a room in the dean's office complex just to deal with discipline problems.

An administrator who had requested a transfer from PDQ told me that all administrators of colour including myself were the objects of parents' racial slurs or mimicry. Fights after school generally involved blacks against white, jocks against dopers, and Mexicans against everyone else. A few parents were often greater problems than the students. Some accused the minority administrators of being tougher on the minority students, while others said we were prejudiced against the white students.

Staff morale was also low. On file when I arrived were seven teacher grievances to the local teachers' union for improper use of prep time, interruption of academic learning time, and other violations of the contract. Teachers were inundated with problems associated with lack of homework, having to repeat lessons, and poor test scores.

How was it possible that school district personnel did not know the proper spelling of a 10-year old school?

Student attendance was at an all-time low. More than 11 per cent of the students were absent daily, yet fewer than ten referrals were made through the juvenile court system. No wonder PDQ students scored below the 50th percentile in overall achievement. School records were disorganized. I could find no information about district inservice trainings conducted in the school, and inventories of books, supplies, keys, and equipment were incomplete. Most startling was my discovery that the name of the school was variously spelled on internal memos, clothing, mailing labels, school equipment, and catalogs as "PDQ," "DQP," "QPD," "MNOQ," "PQRS." How was it possible that school district personnel did not know the proper spelling of a 10-year old school? Were people unaware? Uncaring? At the very least, we were essentially invisible. We had no "school profile" with ourselves or others.

I encountered one of my most unanticipated problems about three weeks into my new assignment. Working late, I left the building at approximately 9:30 P.M. I was startled to find several students from 7 through 12 years of age riding bikes, skateboards, or simply sitting outside the building. When asked why they were there, many responded, "We have no place to go and our parents are working." It was June, but the warm summer night gave no comfort knowing that unsupervised children were everywhere throughout the neighborhood. This condition continued throughout the entire summer.

In three weeks I had barely scratched the surface of problems I would encounter. I needed a plan; I decided on the following course of action:

1. Conduct one-on-one discussions with the assistant principal to ascertain what was praiseworthy and what was detrimental to the school.

2. Conduct weekly conferences with my dean of students, counselors, department chairpersons, and librarian.

3. Meet weekly conferences with my secretarial staff, daily with my head custodian, and monthly with the custodians.

4. Create surveys for parents, teachers, staff, and students using open-ended and specific questions.

5. Present the survey results to all administrative staff, deans, counselors, librarian, department chairpersons, head custodian, and secretaries.

6. Use the information to determine strategies to resolve problems and develop new programs.

7. Develop with staff input objectives for the school, teachers, and departments.

8. Develop a clear, complete, and concise plan for each goal.

He thought the building was clean and presentable. "Others seemed happy before this year," he mumbled.

My first priority was improving the maintenance of the facility so that students and staff would return to a respectable building. The head custodian and I conducted an inspection of the entire facility and set-up a cleaning schedule. The inspection resulted in twenty-three work orders for repairs and fourteen memos requesting work to be completed on previous orders that had been ignored.

The head custodian was not pleased with the new set of expectations I had written for him. On August 1, I received word that he had requested a transfer. I asked him to reconsider and to make the needs of the school his top priority. He thought the building was clean and presentable. *"Others seemed happy before this year,"* he mumbled. He claimed that he had given up trying to do more because it was hard to get good help and the crew was not very skillful. Moreover, he had broken equipment and no funding to purchase cleaning supplies.

I asked him to put together a priority list for both supplies and equipment and to document deficiencies of the crew members. Next, I requested the custodial supervisor to inspect the building monthly and to check on individual crew members.

By the end of November, only two custodians remained from the original seven-member crew. I appointed a new head custodian who

was not any better than the first. The next head custodian proved to be an excellent choice. Under her leadership, the necessary repairs were made and PDQ became one of the finest facilities in the district. We eventually saw the day the our school was recognized as one of the finest in the district. In fact, three of the crew members were promoted to head custodian positions in area schools. Two of them were the crew members who decided to "hang tough" with me during the original change in leadership. The woman who brought about this transformation now inspects the performances of head custodians throughout the district.

"In my twenty-three years of service in this district, I've never been asked to do this. It is not my responsibility."

I next analyzed the responsibilities of the staff. I learned that one of our teachers spent two periods a day operating the audio-visual department. During those hours, students had to go to other classrooms adding to class loads of other teachers. I inquired about the librarian's duties because in other junior high schools the audio-visual inventory, distribution, care, and repair were her duties.

Mrs. Q was the first and only librarian in the school's history. When I told her the changes I wanted to make, she replied, *"In my twenty-three years of service in this district, I've never been asked to do this. It is not my responsibility."* My quick survey of other schools like ours indicated that A-V generally was on the librarian's job. When I broke the news to her, I offered her side time or an adult volunteer, money to buy equipment, and two substitute days to visit other junior high schools. She responded, *"You are blatantly unfair! I am a dedicated librarian! These new duties will prevent me from doing the book talks with classes. I'll never be able to work closely with teachers!"* Mrs. Q cried as she spoke. I was moved by her appeal and felt genuine sorrow for upsetting her.

I had a choice to make. Mrs. Q was eligible for retirement soon. Should I work with her or wait her out and start my program with someone less entrenched? I decided on the former path. I tried to build a better relationship with Mrs. Q. I included her in the departmental meetings and asked her to speak on the importance of the library. I responded to her complaints about the lack of reference books, the problems of unreturned books, and the library's poor budget.

That year, I designated one-half the school-wide fund to buy reference books, while entreating our students to be more diligent about returning books on time. We launched a book recruiting project. Meanwhile, we wrote an application for grant monies for the purchase of multicultural and ethnic books and organized a book recovery project. I found a volunteer parent to help as a library aide.

and encouraged Mrs. Q to visit other school libraries. She began to trust that I would do as much I as could for her.

A few months later, I was pleasantly surprised to find Mrs. Q. in the workroom of the library putting together an inventory for audio-visual equipment similar to that used in a school she had visited. By the second semester, she had a larger budget, a well-run audio-visual department, a high circulation, and more reference books. Over time, we found hobbies of mutual interest. I had noticed that she brought in flower arrangements to add to the appearance of the library. I occasionally brought flowers to her. She in turn began to decorate the front offices. Today, we enjoy our friendship. I had "gambled" on what I believed was a good employee who needed to know resources could be found and efforts would be made to help her do her job successfully. We are both pleased. My gamble had paid off.

Next, I turned my attention to the unsupervised children on the school grounds at night. Since no community education or recreation programs existed in a five-mile radius, we needed a school and community partnership to provide suitable recreational facilities for "at-risk" students and families in the neighborhood.

We contacted community activists who, in turn, initiated contacts within the Recreation and Leisure Activities Department, while I spoke with my supervisors. We worked out a shared-use agreement and established a partnership program. With community support we created a community school board and hired a program director. Currently, more than 300 students attend nightly and eleven elementary schools provide a "latch-key program" funded through the PDQ Community School. The programs provide tutorial assistance, after-school snacks, and supervision until working parents can pick up their children. On week days, adults and children use PDQ daily from 3:30 to 9:00 P.M. The school also provides Saturday programs and "Kid Kamp" summer programs.

The teachers' main concerns were racial conflict, low student attendance, and grievances due to interruptions to instructional time.

In time, our school has become the focus of community support. Park rangers from the city recreation department, school police from the district, and the people in the neighborhood have all helped to reduce graffiti and vandalism in the area.

Early on in my work at PDQ, my assistant principal and I began visiting classrooms and meeting with department chairpersons. We conducted a teacher survey and distributed the results through the department chairpersons. The survey showed that only a handful of teachers experienced discipline problems, and that the teachers' main concerns were racial conflict, low student attendance, and grievances due to interruptions to instructional time.

We identified teachers with inordinately high referral rates for discipline problems and asked them to meet with the dean of students and the administration. I expressed our desire to work with the teachers to improve discipline in their classes, and asked them to establish an assertive plan which both the dean and I would help them enforce.

I arranged a weekly meeting at which teachers could view videotapes on classroom control, but I discouraged prolonged sessions or negative discussions. I arranged for district consultants to hold inservice workshops on teaching methodology and obtained grant monies to purchase substitute time for peer observation programs so that less-prepared teachers could observe more experienced teachers in their classrooms. Meanwhile, my assistant principal and I continued to observe the teachers and offer additional suggestions for improving instruction.

Written parent complaints filed with the assistant superintendent declined from 117 to ten.

At the end of the year, one teacher who was evaluated unsatisfactory resigned, a probationary teacher's probation was extended, two teachers transferred to other schools, and three teachers improved and were rated satisfactory.

The special education teachers who had high referral rates also attended the inservice training and worked with consultants with special education training. Two of these teachers transferred to other schools and a third teacher improved.

At the end of the first year, written parent complaints filed with the assistant superintendent declined from 117 to ten. The following year they fell to seven, and the next year to three. No written complaints have been received for the past three years.

To reduce racial conflicts, we increased minority staffing to reflect the school community. We made a special effort to hire minority teachers, secretaries, and teacher aides. We handpicked specific teachers and aides who were especially good with students outside the classroom to work in student council, honor society, and the human relations club. We made a special effort to encourage minority students to participate in school activities. We saw results. Fights and racial conflicts dropped significantly. We reduced referrals to an alternative school by 50 per cent. By the second year, student referrals reflected the racial percentages of the school population.

To reduce grievances, we gave a special teachers' advisory group elected by their peers access to the administration on an "as needed basis." After one year, communication with department

chairpersons improved sufficiently so that the group no longer requested to meet with me. We also responded to teachers' complaints about interruptions of allocated instructional time. Department chairpersons and the administration agreed to give teachers two weeks notice of any event that would interrupt instructional time. Teachers were given the option of attending assemblies at which attendance was not required. Consequently, no grievances have been filed since I became principal.

No grievances have been filed since I became principal.

At the end of the semester, I sponsored a luncheon for teachers which the administration prepared and served. Staff reaction was so positive I promised to have another luncheon at the end of the year. In May, my administrative staff and I established a Staff Appreciation Week. We asked the administrative team, counselors, and secretaries to join with teacher and staff volunteers in creating activities and events to celebrate the efforts of the whole staff. I set aside $500 from school-generated funds to support the committee. Years later, we still have Staff Appreciation Week as well as a monthly staff recognition event. The Staff Recognition Program has received three grants and has been recognized by the school district's Teaching Excellence Program.

Recently, I found myself reflecting on the accomplishments of PDQ Junior High. Teacher moral is at an all-time high. The school has been recognized by the State Board of Education twice in six years as an exemplary junior high school. Community education and after-hours programs have been successful, and racial conflict has been reduced. The facility is cleaner and the school environment is safer. Teachers, the majority of students, and their parents share pride with me in the school. As I left PDQ recently, I thought, *"Parents, teachers, students, and staff, together we made great things happen."*

I have these thoughts about my experience as a principal at PDQ. I learned quite a lot, about myself and school leadership.

1. Making changes is long, hard work in a school where things have not gone well.
2. The leader has to have a vision of what he/she wants and has to share it and develop it with the help of others.
3. The leader must attack several problems all at once but not lose track of the people involved: students, teachers, parents, and staff.
4. Setting priorities and getting maximum use of available resources is crucial when resources are scarce—and they usually are.

5. Everyone is needed to make things go. Cooperation and coordination of effort is crucial. Staff and community support is vital.

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